



# Principal Wishart (1692-1753) and the controversies of his day

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## I

Although William Wishart was not an original thinker, it is important in intellectual history to study the minor and middle-ranking figures who define the context that gives meaning to the work of the great minds. Wishart was a practising theologian in the age of Francis Hutcheson and David Hume. He is a good representative of a range of interests that attracted a significant group of Scottish *literati* in the first half of the eighteenth century. To study such a group, or representative of a group, is to see what ideas were fashionable, what assumptions were commonplace. It helps us to identify the hidden framework – the undercurrents and constraints, as well as the live controversies of the day. In general, we shall obtain more understanding from studying a major author's contemporaries and immediate predecessors than from analytical commentators, as analytical commentary is currently practised. This is a pity, as the good analyst and the good historical scholar are drawing upon similar mental skills.

Wishart is best known to intellectual historians as the Scottish divine who sabotaged Hume's chances of a university teaching career, but only in the last decade has the true picture of that episode come to light.<sup>1</sup> He has tended to be typecast as one of the obstacles to the kind of social and intellectual progress that many associate with the Scottish Enlightenment.<sup>2</sup> My main aim here is to discredit this typecasting. This is less difficult, now that scholars are becoming aware of the tensions and antagonisms between Hume's thought and that of Hutcheson, for.

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<sup>1</sup> See M.A. Stewart, *The Kirk and the Infidel* (inaugural lecture, Lancaster, 1995), and sources cited in footnote 1 of that study. I have discussed other aspects of Wishart's work in "William Wishart, an early critic of *Alciphron*", *Berkeley Newsletter*, 6 (1982/3), 5-9, and "Berkeley and the Rankenian club", *Hermathena*, 139 (1985), 25-45.

<sup>2</sup> One influential source for this view, as for many other prevalent errors about the Scottish Enlightenment, is E.C. Mossner's overrated *Life of David Hume* (Edinburgh, 1954; 2nd edn., Oxford, 1980).

as we shall see, Wishart was a major ally of Hutcheson. First, some biographical detail may be useful.

Wishart was born, probably at Leith, in 1692 and died at Edinburgh on 12 May 1753. His date of birth is calculated from information on his age in the Leiden University register some years later, and is consistent with the fact that his parents married in the previous year. His is the third generation in succession of William Wisharts to hold pastoral office in the Scottish church. William Wishart I (1621-92), minister of Kinneil, and William Wishart II (1660-1729) had suffered imprisonment for their Presbyterian allegiances, and when Wishart II was appointed to South Leith the presbytery of Edinburgh and the magistrates of Leith took the church by force to dislodge the episcopalian incumbent.<sup>3</sup>

These family associations are worth a moment's consideration. Wishart I had been a supporter of the "Protesters", that is, those who in 1651 protested at the disingenuous expediency with which the future King Charles had been got to subscribe to the Covenant. He thus aligned himself with that party in Scottish Presbyterianism that repudiated politically-driven compromises and that was looking instead towards theological reconciliation with the several Dissenting interests in England. The grandson inherited these sympathies, although the theological boundary-lines had moved by then. Wishart II was perceived and respected as an orthodox theologian in his day – publishing sermons with uninspiring titles like *A Discourse of Suppressing Vice* (1702) – and, perhaps for this reason, no real attention has yet been paid to the kind of intellectual climate that obtained in his father's manse as Wishart III was growing up. But the father's two-volume *magnum opus*, *Theologia* (1716), merits reappraisal. It was brought to completion during the son's years in divinity school, and unused subscription forms for it became the scrap paper for some of his

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<sup>3</sup> H. Scott, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanæ*, new edn., 7 vols. (Edinburgh, 1915-28), i. 136, 163, 211-12. They derived from the same family of Wishart of Pittarrow whose collateral lines produced the sixteenth-century reformer and martyr, George Wishart; the seventeenth-century bishop of Edinburgh, also George; and another seventeenth-century William Wishart who was driven from South Leith church for episcopalian sympathies. For the wider family connections see D. Wishart, *Genealogical History of the Wisharts of Pittarrow and Logie Wishart* (Perth, 1914).

early sermons.<sup>4</sup> It shows a more philosophical cast of mind than fits the conventional stereotype of a Calvinist preacher, arguing that revealed religion, which forms the basis for human salvation, can only establish its credentials where natural religion, despite our limitations, has laid the foundations for belief.<sup>5</sup> So it is necessary that the existence of God be established by “proof and demonstration”. To rebut the atheism of the times, the belief should be founded on “Undeniable Evidence” and demonstrated by “Natural Reason” (i. 35-8). He therefore offers a cosmological argument, based on a demonstration that “the World and all the Creatures in it, must be from some Cause” and a deduction of the attributes of the first cause; and a representative teleological argument, based on the assumption that human beings embody to a limited degree “all the Perfections of the several Natures of the World” (39-40).

Wishart III, whom I shall refer to from now on simply as “Wishart”, entered the arts faculty at Edinburgh University in 1706, having the status of a “supervenient” student. Such *supervenientes* were excused the initial Greek class, normally because they had had inadequate schooling in the subject, and went straight into the three years of the philosophy course, using Latin translations where Greek sources were required. Wishart was a student during the last few years of the regent system under which the same cohort of students studied the whole curriculum under the same teacher. Wishart studied under William Law, who was later to be the first designated professor of moral philosophy at the university.<sup>6</sup> Law taught moral philosophy as a branch of natural religion, something that left its mark on Wishart for the rest of his career. After graduating M.A. in 1709, Wishart trained for the ministry. His earliest surviving manuscript sermon, written on

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<sup>4</sup> See the uncatalogued shorthand papers of William Wishart, Edinburgh University Library, MS La. II. 114-115. Any subsequent unidentified references to Wishart III’s papers are to this collection.

<sup>5</sup> “He that cometh to God must believe that he is” (Hebrews xi. 6, cited in *Theologia*, i, 34). The strategy is said to be derived from the English Dissenter Stephen Charnock, but Wishart II’s reading tends to be more conservative than Charnock’s and some of it belongs to a later generation. While they do not loom large in his narrative, he does nevertheless show knowledge of Locke, Toland and Stillingfleet on the subject of mysteries (ii, 840-45).

<sup>6</sup> Law’s syllabus can be pieced together from a number of student dictates now in Edinburgh University Library and the National Library of Scotland.

small leaves of paper in a minute speedhand (an alphabet-based shorthand), dates from 1716, and he was licenced as a preacher by the presbytery of Edinburgh in 1717. He went over to the continent for a couple of years (1717-18), preaching in London along the way, and then to the Scots congregations at Rotterdam and Leiden. He enrolled as a student in the faculty of letters at Leiden, so must have been seeking to broaden his general education rather than to obtain specifically theological training. While on the continent he ran out of money and wrote home to his father, who sent back a reproving letter on the virtues of thrift.

After his return to Scotland, Wishart began to preach once a week at a small meeting-house in Skinner's Close in Edinburgh.<sup>7</sup> This was within the Tron parish of which his father, who was by now also Principal of the University, was minister. Wishart found these circumstances too confining, writing to a correspondent in 1722 that he saw "but litle Prospect of doing any Considerable Good" in this position.<sup>8</sup> He sought to teach "That Religion is Virtue & Charity; that the promoting of These is the Great Design of Christianity; & that the Perfection of Those Noble Qualitys is the Cheif Ingredient in That Happiness & those Rewards by which It animates us", but he lacked the oratorical skill necessary to sway a congregation with whom he had little rapport. They were "Common People, Educated & Grown up, nay Grown Old, in Prejudices & Enthusiasm". It called for preachers of another mould, "the Abettors of Savage Zeal, Feirce Bigottry, and Dire Superstition", to prevail over such "Corrupt Passions & Inveterate Prejudices of men's Minds"; but that was no way, either to instil virtue, or to convey "a Pure & Peacable religion". In 1724, Wishart accepted a call to the Tron Church of Glasgow, and within a year married Margaret, daughter of Thomas Halyburton, lately of St Andrews. Wishart's father and Halyburton were theologians of equal prominence and there is little doubt that the two families would have been well

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<sup>7</sup> But he also travelled. There survives, for example, a sermon preached in 1721 in Old Aberdeen. It is likely that his association with George Turnbull, discussed below, is at work there, but I am not yet in a position to decipher the sermon to say how consistent it is with the image the two of them present in their correspondence. Turnbull was appointed to Aberdeen, albeit to Marischal College, in 1721.

<sup>8</sup> See the Appendix below, letter 1.



acquainted, but the younger generation on both sides moved away from their parents' conservative orthodoxy. Wishart's father was Argathelian in his politics and was one of those brought in as part of the Royal Commission secured by Islay to investigate the University of Glasgow in 1727. The father's political connections may have helped launch the son's career, and Wishart fights causes that have Argathelian backing while he is in Glasgow. He stays broadly within that fold until he breaks ranks in the final stage of his career.

At this time there was considerable student unrest at Glasgow. Through being around at the right time, and not sharing the resentment his fellow ministers felt at recent events at the university, Wishart got elected Dean of Faculty in 1728, a post reserved to one of the city ministers; and he participated in the hotly contested election of Hutcheson to the chair of moral philosophy in 1729. In the same year, at the height of controversy over the orthodoxy of the divinity professor, John Simson, Wishart published in Edinburgh an anonymous pamphlet *A Short and Impartial State of the Case of Mr John Simson*.<sup>9</sup> He left Glasgow a year later, taking with him the DD degree, and settled as Scots minister in London. Here Wishart made friends with the radical latitudinarian circle round Benjamin Hoadly,<sup>10</sup> to whom much later he dedicated a small volume of sermons; and with Rational Dissenters like Benjamin Avery, Nathaniel Lardner, George Benson, and Isaac Watts – covering the theological spectrum from orthodox to Arian. He served as a book purchasing agent for Hutcheson, who seems never to have visited England. Two discourses published in London during this period were ill received back in his native land: "Charity the End of the Commandment" (1731) and "The Certain and Unchangeable Difference betwixt Moral Good and Evil" (1732). In his student days Wishart had admired the philosophy of George Berkeley, and while in London he published anonymously a literary satire on Berkeley's

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<sup>9</sup> Wishart's authorship is identified in markings on Robert Wodrow's copy, now in the National Library of Scotland.

<sup>10</sup> Hoadly was by now Bishop of Salisbury and later of Winchester. He supported toleration and by this time was not unsympathetic to the Dissenters. He held that, since Christ's kingdom was "not of this world", there was no religious basis for the temporal powers exercised by ecclesiastical tribunals, a thesis that was ostensibly anti-Romish but appeared to have implications for authoritarian elements in the Protestant churches.

*Alciphron*.<sup>11</sup> This was *A Vindication of the Reverend D---- B----y, from the Scandalous Imputation of being Author of a late Book, intitled, Alciphron, or, the Minute Philosopher* (1734). *Alciphron* was itself a satire, in part, on the writings of the third Earl of Shaftesbury. Wishart's piece, which is pro-Shaftesbury, is of some slight interest in Berkeley studies and in the history of the reception and perception of Shaftesbury's philosophy.<sup>12</sup>

In the autumn of 1737 Wishart returned to Edinburgh, to the University Principal's post once held by his father. This was undoubtedly a political appointment, bringing in someone of liberal principles whose connections with the English Dissenters would be good for recruitment. Some insight into its immediate repercussions is provided by a contemporary letter from a third party in London to a Dissenting minister in Cambridge. He notes that though the magistrates of Edinburgh had appointed Wishart to be one of the ministers of Edinburgh, no parish had given him a call. "The Presbytery powerfully opposes him, because he is not a true blue, fiery, hot Zelot; and has asserted Something in Sermons preached at his meeting in this neighbourhood, favourable to good works in Justification." Since Wishart had private means, there was some surprise that he nevertheless expected to follow the custom of supplementing his income as Principal (£150 per annum "with a good house & fine Garden") with a minister's salary besides.

My friends having recommended me to him for his hand, I waited upon him last Saturday; I was Surprized at his Civility. He said, as Multitude of Laws was a Sign of a bad Government, and Strictness in Excess has proved the pest of Religion, he's afraid the Scots Kirk is in a declining Condition; for every year their General assembly multiplies their Acts, which are so intricate & puzzling, and executed with more Warmth than

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<sup>11</sup> A London neighbour, G. Douglas, wishing to get hold of some of Berkeley's writings, applied to Wishart. "I remember you were formerly a great admirer of Dr Berkeley's principles; and therefore may be presumed to have his books."

<sup>12</sup> For recent discussion, see I. Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1991-2000), vol. ii, Shaftesbury to Hume.

discretion, it will be necessary, in time, to erect faculties & Professorships in Colleges, to explain them, as the Papists have done their Canon Law.<sup>13</sup>

Once he was back in Edinburgh, Wishart improved the university library, attended colleagues' classes, and established a regular routine for student presentations. He answered his critics in the presbytery in two lengthy pamphlets in self-defence, proving himself as orthodox as he judged the situation to require, but still defending the humane ethic and principles of liberty of conscience espoused in his previous preaching. Eventually, in 1739, he was installed minister of New Greyfriars, transferring to the Tron Church as co-pastor with his brother, George, in 1744. David Fordyce, subsequently a regent at Marischal College, had deputized for the ailing previous incumbent at the Tron in 1741 and reported back to Philip Doddridge: "The Charge where I serve is a collegiate one, and I may say the largest and most conspicuous in Scotland, this church being the grand place of resort to our nobility and best gentry".<sup>14</sup>

Wishart was moderator of the General Assembly in 1745. This was the time he was embroiled in the campaign to keep Hume out of academic life. Two years later he got involved in another *contretemps* after Doddridge, whose work he once admired, appeared to use a memorial tribute to Colonel James Gardiner in 1746 as a pretext to launch an attack on what he perceived as growing theological laxity in the national churches. Wishart published anonymously *A Letter to the Reverend Dr. Doddridge, occasioned by his Life of Col. Gairdner* (1747). A substantial *Essay on the Indispensable Necessity of a Holy and Good Life to the Happiness of Heaven* (1753) caused a stir by its uncompromising condemnation of deathbed repentances which was several times reprinted or included in devotional anthologies after Wishart's death. Although unsympathetic to the argument, Samuel

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<sup>13</sup> Matthew Simson to Zachary Grey, 10 May 1737: Edinburgh University Library, MS La. II. 422/204; quoted by permission of Richard Ovenden, Special Collections Librarian.

<sup>14</sup> *Correspondence and Diary of Philip Doddridge, D.D.*, ed. J.D. Humphreys, 5 vols. (London, 1829-31), iv, 53. Fordyce reports that George Wishart was "one of the most eloquent preachers and worthiest men we have in this country".



Johnson identified Wishart as one of Scotland's few serious theologians on the strength of this performance.<sup>15</sup> Like Hutcheson, Wishart opposed the spread of government patronage in church appointments, seeing it as an infringement of the rights and interests of local representatives. He supported his evangelical opponents on this issue, and alienated his political backers, at a time when the church was in crisis over enforced appointments.

Throughout this period Wishart scanned the review journals and kept up with a good deal of theological and philosophical reading.<sup>16</sup> He used his wealth to subsidize publications he thought would be useful to students, especially of divinity. These included new editions of Henry Scougal's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (1739), the Shaftesbury edition of Benjamin Whichcote's *Select Sermons* (1742), and the Renaissance meditation *De animi tranquillitate* by the Scot Florence Wilson, or "Volusenus" (1751).

## II

I turn now to look in more detail at Wishart's role in some of the controversies of the 1720s and 1730s. I have alluded to student unrest at Glasgow. This had its roots in conflicts within the faculty in 1716. In the hope that it would change the balance of power in the university, opponents of the administration encouraged the students to try to reclaim their traditional rights of representation by agitating for proper participation in the election of their rector. This movement for the restoration of what were in fact statutory rights, in which Hutcheson had participated while completing his theological training in 1716-17, acquired a momentum of its own. It had particular resonances for presbyterian students who had suffered civil disabilities under the Anglican administration of Ireland. A student literary society, the Trinamphorian Club, which used to meet in a city tavern, was later suspected of being a cover for the continuation of this movement. Its

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<sup>15</sup> James Boswell, *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, 23 Sept. 1773.

<sup>16</sup> And more. In a shorthand notebook in which he records William Cleghorn's inaugural lecture, and notes on works by Fordyce, Heineccius, John Jones, Doddridge, Kames, the younger Turretin, Ruddiman, Bolingbroke, and others, he also expresses his outrage at the dangers to youth posed by *Fanny Hill*, which he seems to have read from cover to cover to find and transcribe its ironically moralizing coda.

leaders received encouragement from some of the theologues at Edinburgh, the most prominent of whom were involved in a similar tavern club, the Rankenian Club. Wishart together with the philosopher George Turnbull, and Turnbull's future brother-in-law the theologian-economist Robert Wallace, are the best known among these Edinburgh intellectuals. That Wishart and Turnbull, at least, aided and abetted Glasgow's student leaders is clear from surviving correspondence with Robert, Viscount Molesworth. Molesworth, a former British diplomatist and political writer who held an Irish peerage, was a British MP until his re-election in 1722 was declared void. The Glasgow students, perhaps through some Irish connection, had enlisted his support to bring the situation at Glasgow to the notice of government. Molesworth's previously close association with Shaftesbury, and what was thought, perhaps inaccurately, to be his close ties with the authors of "Cato's Letters" in the *London Journal* and of *The Independent Whig*, are a recurring theme in their correspondence. It signals an opposition to church influences in the state and in education, an idealization of Stoic values in republican Rome, and an optimistic view of their relevance to later society.<sup>17</sup> Turnbull's first letter to Molesworth contains in a postscript an early description of Wishart:

He is a Gentleman of a very fine taste a truly Worthy Honest Fellow. 'Tis to him I in a great measure owe my acquaintance with the Earl of Shaftesbury's works; and there is none perhaps who has Studied these Excellent writings more, or understands them better. He was Educated by his Presbyterian Friends for the sacred Function & 'Een commenced Preacher before he came to his present free State of mind & just notion of Religion & Vertue. But is now a very sincere promoter of Liberty & true

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<sup>17</sup> M.A. Stewart, "John Smith and the Molesworth circle", *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 2 (1987), 89-102; "Academic freedom: Origins of an idea", *Bulletin of the Australian Society of Legal Philosophy*, 16:57 (1991/2), 1-31. Several commentators have confused the details of this story and mistakenly claimed that Molesworth was himself elected rector of Glasgow University.

Vertue by his sermons & otherwise. And indeed he is very well fitted to do service here in the honest cause being wise as well.<sup>18</sup>

Molesworth invited Wishart to get in touch, and Wishart's response, in October 1722, tells us more of his background and ambitions to be a member of "the Honourable & Happy Society of the Virtuous". He was not only out of tune with the congregation committed to his charge, but he was critical of the Scottish educational system he had just gone through. Virtue, "the Noblest Foundation of Freindship & Familiarity", knows no social barriers. He speaks warmly of "the Dawnings of a Revival of Ancient Virtue & the Love of True Liberty", particularly among his own confrères, and he commends the public-spiritedness of the Glasgow students. He writes of "Several Others of my Acquaintance in this City" – members of the Rankenian Club at Edinburgh – "& some other Places in this Country, & even some Few of my Own Coat" who are "heartily Attach't to the Noble Cause of Virtue Truth & Liberty". He is convinced that the clergy need to become philosophers, and "to Imitate those who of Old obtain'd that Name, from their Instructing the Youth & the People in Social Virtue". He reflects on a dilemma that will underlie much of his career: is it safe to adopt the methods of open trading, or must one become an intellectual smuggler? If you are too successful in "Opening Strong Truths to Weak Eyes" you may lose your job and your ability to do good:

'twere better for men, in this Case, e'en to Keep their Virtue to themselves; so far as Quietly to Pay the Dutys & Taxes the Publick think Fit to Exact of them, for their Share of the Commerce; or, if they have any Unenterable Goods to Run, manage the matter with Proper Secrecy.

Wishart would soon have to show how well he could tread this line when he took his stand in defence of Simson in 1729. His father would seriously fear for Wishart's ability to remain in his vocation.

In a world in which so much liberal writing was anonymous, Wishart was keen to know just what Molesworth had written.

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<sup>18</sup> Turnbull to Lord Molesworth, 3 Aug. 1722: National Library of Ireland, microfilm neg. 4082. For Wishart's extant letters to Molesworth, see Appendix, letters 1-2.

Molesworth replied, instead, with guidance on other authors. Wishart's response of November 1723 confirms that he had been inadequately trained in Greek. Among Latin writers whom he could handle, Molesworth had set Wishart to read George Buchanan, who had rewritten Scottish history to try to show that medieval sovereigns derived their authority from the consent of their subjects. Other reading included Machiavelli's *Discourses* on Livy and the work of Livy himself, James Harrington's political writings, and the morals of Confucius – all good political fodder for liberal intellectuals. On the theological side, Molesworth pointed Wishart to the sermons of Archbishop Tillotson. It says something for the culture of early eighteenth-century Edinburgh that Wishart was already familiar with Tillotson's views of "a Religion intirely calculated for the Benefite & Happiness of Mankind". He even considered Tillotson not liberal *enough* in his views of "certain Dogmata", and that "in handling the Nature & Grounds of Moral Virtue he does not go enough to the Bottom of things". The dogma that Tillotson had explored most was the Trinity, though his handling of it was regarded by some as heterodox.

When Wishart moved to Glasgow he got involved in the corresponding student club there – so much so that it was renamed Sophocardian ("Wise Heart") in his honour. The vigilant Robert Wodrow quickly got wind of Wishart's connection with an Edinburgh club committed to greater freedom of thought.<sup>19</sup> Wishart's interest in the political situation at Glasgow University continued, and when an Irish divinity student, William Robertson (who had previously studied with Hutcheson in Dublin), was expelled for political activism in 1725, Wishart kept him informed on the work of eliminating "tyranny" from the institution.<sup>20</sup> But when Simson, one of its leading disciplinarians, came under censure himself after 1726 on suspicion of supporting the theology of Samuel Clarke, Wishart rallied to his defence. *A Short and Impartial State of the Case* opens with a characteristic Wishart move

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Wodrow, *Analecta*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1842-3), iii, 175, 183. On pp. 178 and 246, Wodrow noted reports that Wishart was on good terms with the Nonsubscribers in Ireland, and that he was evasive on the Trinity and "mysteries".

<sup>20</sup> John Disney, "Original memoirs of Dr. Robertson of Wolverhampton", *Gentleman's Magazine* (Sept. 1783), 745-50.



which would be repeated in an opposite context, years later, when he took a stand against Hume:

'Tis both against my Conscience and Inclination, to take up or entertain Suspensions of any Man, without just grounds; and upon hearing bad Reports of any Man, I think my self obliged to suspend my Judgment, till I have duly and carefully enquired into the Grounds of them, with all the Aversion and Backwardness to believe these Reports, which belong to that *Charity that thinketh no Evil*. (*State of the Case*, 5)

The biblical allusion here (1 Corinthians xiii. 5) runs through Wishart's pamphlet as he challenges the moral and intellectual motives of Simson's clerical opponents, one of whom is accused of outright lying in his zeal to make Simson responsible for the heresies of others. Wishart contrasts the "Way of calm Reasoning and Argument" of those who thought Simson guilty of nothing worse than verbal clumsiness in the heat of the moment, with "a vast Deal of that *Wrath of Man*, which *worketh not the Righteousness of God*"<sup>21</sup> exhibited by those who construed any attempt to take a balanced view as a repudiation of Christ. The debate had been turned into a vote for the truth a particular view of the person of Christ, regardless of the truth of Simson's accepting or rejecting it.

Wishart's response is in part a study in the credibility of testimony, applying to student testimony the kinds of criteria that the new epistemology had brought to the study of the biblical record. These criteria were, indeed, implicit in the law, and both Simson and Wishart argued, justly, that the presbytery of Glasgow flouted all principles of equity and justice. Even if it could be established, fifteen months after the event, what a small minority of his students, in disagreement with the majority, believed Simson had said in a classical language they scarcely understood, the terminology he allegedly used still required interpretation. It had to do with the ascription of necessary existence and independence to the second member of the Trinity. Wishart would not have found this language in his father's exposition of the same dogma,<sup>22</sup> where the attributes are, rather, those of infinity, eternity, etc. Wishart himself tries to move the debate on to these latter terms, on

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<sup>21</sup> James i. 20.

<sup>22</sup> *Theologia*, discourse 20.

which he can show that Simson was quite orthodox; and then to bring out the absurdity in asking uneducated countryfolk to rule on matters of abstruse metaphysics. The lay elder has his rightful place in the discipline and government of the church, but he does not have a divine right to “what, through the Defect either of his natural Parts, or of his Education, he is under a natural Incapacity of”. If his “natural Incapacity” has been “supernaturally supplied”, we would need “extraordinary Evidence” of such a rarity (*State of the Case*, 36). Instead, zealous demagogues “endeavour to amuse and to cast a Blind upon others, by adducing in the Case before us such Scripture-Expressions as that the Children of GOD *shall be all taught of GOD*, and that the Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven are *revealed* even to *Babes*”,<sup>23</sup> interpreting this as a promise that God will give the pious but illiterate a supernatural understanding of “the most Scholastic Terms”:

To understand, for Instance, the Meaning of the Words, *Numerical and Specific Unity*, and the Difference betwixt these two, *Necessary-existence*, *Self-existence* and *Independency*, and the Fitness or Propriety of the Use of these Words; and whether all, or any of them, are to be used or not in talking of the Trinity, or of any of the glorious Persons of the Godhead. (pp. 36-7)

The fact is, pretty certainly, that Simson was a conscientious supporter of the Westminster Confession but he had a more historically informed view of its purpose than his narrow-minded critics.<sup>24</sup> Although the controversy was over his supposed concessions to the Arianism of Clarke, our only hard evidence for his settled opinion (which comes from his correspondence with Archibald Campbell of St Andrews) is that he supported Clarke in metaphysics, believing passionately in the soundness of his *a priori* demonstrations of the being and attributes of God.<sup>25</sup> That he came to find Clarke’s *theology* heretical and abandoned it may well be true.

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<sup>23</sup> Isaiah liv. 13 (misquoted); Matthew xii. 25, Luke x. 21.

<sup>24</sup> A. Skoczylas, “Professor John Simson and the Growth of Enlightenment in the Church of Scotland”, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Western Ontario, 1996.

<sup>25</sup> National Archives of Scotland, GD 461/15.

### III

Wishart's liberal leanings were common knowledge to his friends,<sup>26</sup> but Wodrow indicates that they were not public knowledge before his arrival in Glasgow, where his appointment was due to political influence rather than an informed decision of the local congregation. He nevertheless built up a following, and there were emotional scenes at his farewell sermon. He was probably already more liberal theologically than Simson, but it is no surprise that Simson sometimes attended Wishart's church. They would have agreed that religion should be rationally founded and that the students of it must be aware of the different sides in an argument. Regardless of the matters of principle that brought them together, they also shared an antipathy to the intolerantly conservative local presbytery.

There can be no doubt that when Wishart received the call to London, he was attracted by the greater intellectual liberty of the metropolis.<sup>27</sup> As minister of the Scots congregation there, he had both the theological qualifications to move freely in Dissenting circles and the political chaplain's function that also brought him contact with leaders of the Established Church. Memories of the Salters' Hall controversy of 1719-20, in which a significant number of English Presbyterians dissociated themselves from subscription to the Confession, can hardly have been dead, and some of Wishart's closest friends were avowed nonsubscribers; but they drew support also from the theology of Hoadly, an ally of the Scottish student radicals and the close friend and literary executor of Samuel Clarke. Even if, as Wodrow suggests, Wishart's new congregation included diehard Calvinists, it must have been a relatively cosmopolitan community of the kind he would have previously encountered in the Netherlands. Until more work has been done to decipher his shorthand sermons, however, we have only the published record to rely on.

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<sup>26</sup> A scrap of a letter in an unknown hand expresses the hope that Wishart's coming to Glasgow will "give Courage" to some, and that "the Cause of Virtue, Liberty" will develop in that part of Scotland "if the Friends to it are cautious".

<sup>27</sup> In 1742, Wishart wrote back from Edinburgh to George Benson in London, saying how much he now missed "such honest, free, inquisitive friends, as I had with you" (*Biographia Britannica*, 2nd edn. (London, 1784), article "Benson", note P). Benson was a Socinian or Arian.

The two discourses that Wishart published early in his London period were for special occasions and were not written for his normal Sunday congregation. "Charity the End of the Commandment" was a Charity School sermon of a kind that would have been already familiar in parts of Scotland through the work of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge; "The Certain and Unchangeable Difference betwixt Moral Good and Evil" was addressed to the Society for the Reformation of Manners, that is, for the rehabilitation of offenders. They were republished in Wishart's small collection of *Discourses on Several Subjects* (1753) in which, at the end of his life, he acknowledged his great debt to Hoadly.

Both discourses evince Wishart's interest in practical ethics and summarize a view of moral psychology which he shared with his "worthy and ingenious friend" Hutcheson. Charity, "the great End in Life for such rational Creatures as we are", he sees as a camaraderie with the whole rational creation and its creator (Charity sermon, pp. 3, 6). It is based in "a disposition of Benevolence, or social affection in Human Nature, independent of all deliberate views of self-interest". This runs contrary to the malign view of "fashionable Moralists", whose position is belied by "every plain man" who "is sensible of such a benevolent principle in himself; who can, with an honest heart, say to his neighbour, *I am glad to see you well* ... and who, withall considers what force in the mind that sympathizing sense has, when the mind is under no byass from some private good interfering with the good of others" (7-8). This disposition has a "beauty and amiableness", from which we derive "a just sense of its excellency" which serves us as a rational motive to withstand contrary passions (8-10), but it will not be fully activated without training, practice and self-denial. "Our other affections must be brought into subjection to it, and under the government of it: and those unnatural passions, and excesses of our self-affections, that are contrary to it, must be rooted out, and put far from us" (10). A good character is best instilled young, before a bad character becomes ingrained (33-4). There are limits, however, to the use of legitimate power to keep people on a virtuous course, unless there is a threat to civil order; for without liberty of conscience, there is no virtue.

This thesis is elaborated in the second discourse, which is largely devoted to the real distinction between good and evil, and the existence.



nature, advantage and attraction of benevolent affections. Those who have not succeeded in sorting out their appetites aright are at discord with themselves. But human nature is such that we may go far in “reclaiming our Neighbours from any Thing that is amiss in them” if we will only concentrate on “Instruction, Persuasion, and the Influence of a good Example”. Punishment should be “confined to such Crimes of the vicious as are hurtful to others about them, or disturb the Peace of human Society”, thus preserving that liberty of conscience, especially in religion, “without the Exercise of which in some Measure there could be no Virtue” (Reformation sermon, 29-30). He concluded in this case with a strong attack on those who intrude upon that liberty of conscience by improper uses of religious education, instilling ritual forms and sectarian prejudices without communicating understanding, thereby sowing the seeds of later irreligion. Here he is anticipating rather than following Hutcheson.

Wishart believed that crime was a function more of ignorance than of native human depravity, and that the ignorance was due to “the gross and general Neglect of a rational and virtuous Education” both in the home and in the schools. This sets limits to the magistrate’s power to punish offenders. Echoing earlier comments to Molesworth on the corruption in university education, Wishart concluded his address by provocatively pointing to the “Looseness and Debauchery” which he saw as the direct consequence of the religious education that had been intended to prevent it.

The Care of Parents, or Instructors, about the religious Part of Education, is almost wholly spent in inculcating upon young Ones the *Shibboleth* of a Party; making them acquainted with, and instilling into them a Regard for the particular Doctrines or peculiar Forms of their own Sect; in which there may oft-times be found a Mixture of Things absurd or trifling; which yet are inculcated with as great Earnestness, and by the same Methods, with the most weighty and important Points; while great Pains are taken to inspire in them, at the same Time, a strong Aversion to those of another Way of Thinking, and that by Methods which even a childish Capacity may discern to be contrary to Equity and Charity.

The result is that, “instead of forming their Minds to a rational Sense of Good and Evil, a Taste and Relish for true Piety and Virtue, upon such Principles as will stand the Test of a most strict Examination”, everything involves the exercise of threat and authority. This is simply corrupting of “liberal Piety and Virtue” and “a Relish for true Goodness, and Savour of Honesty in the Mind”. Instead, children are brought up to gratify their parents’ wills, “whose Devotion and Piety, at the same Time, they observe to be exerted in such a Way as tends to give them no amiable and inviting, but rather a disgusting and forbidding View of it: And all the while, their kind and generous Affections are rather check’d, than forwarded and improv’d; while every selfish Passion and Appetite, instead of being regularly check’d and corrected, is rather in many Cases humour’d and encouraged” (33-4).

Although these themes are interwoven with themes of regular divinity, in which the acts of God and the life of Christ offer the perfect instantiations of the benevolent character, the social ideal which comes across is of an administration in which the “universal Governour” is the archetypal moderate, enforcing minimum discipline firmly but gently in a world of rational and aesthetically sensitive beings, and this was clearly for Wishart the correct way to harmonize philosophy and religion.

Wishart’s pamphlet against Berkeley, which is the other known product of his London years, should be seen in the context of events in the early 1730s. Berkeley had come back to Britain in disappointment in 1732, having failed to secure the financial support he had expected from the government for his missionary college in Bermuda. He had completed the manuscript of *Alciphron* and it was published on his return. This attacked on a broad front the kinds of fashionable intellectuals (variously disguised as “freethinkers” who traced their philosophical inspiration ultimately to Locke) whose writing he judged to be anti-religious in its tendency and a great influence on leading members of the Whig government. In fact the theologians on the government side, like Hoadly, also mistrusted Berkeley’s High Church allegiances. They thought his missionary project as visionary as his metaphysics, and there was plenty of lobbying going on to try to block the ecclesiastical promotion that Berkeley was openly seeking in compensation. Wishart weighs into this debate on the Whig side.

seeking to discredit Berkeley's attack on the followers of Shaftesbury. Part of the significance of this engagement lies in the fact that the Rankenian Club, of which Wishart had been a founding member, had been early admirers not only of Shaftesbury's but of Berkeley's philosophy at a time when there was no perceived incompatibility between the two. There is an old anecdote that they started a correspondence with Berkeley and that he unsuccessfully tried to attract them to join his Bermuda college. This is quite credible, since they also started up the correspondence with Molesworth, and Turnbull attempted it with the deist Toland.

In his pamphlet, Wishart pretended to exonerate the real Berkeley from authorship of a weak satire in which the opponents of religion are merely caricatured. Even if Shaftesbury's "Regard to Revelation" was less than it should have been, Wishart could not see how Berkeley should "fall foul of his Notions concerning Virtue, his Plea for disinterested Love, his Representations of the Beauty of moral Characters, the *to kalon* and *to prepon*". He found Berkeley's representation of these views "silly", and deplored his unworthy insinuations about Shaftesbury's moral character. He thought that as Berkeley lifted his objections against Mandeville from Hutcheson, he should have accepted Hutcheson's guidance on Shaftesbury's ethics too if the light in which Shaftesbury himself had represented it "was too strong for his Moon-blind Eyes".

Wishart considered Grotius a better apologist for Christianity than the author of *Alciphron*, and found difficulties in Berkeley's new account of theological language. Words may not always be intended to convey ideas, but propositions that are required to be believed surely are: Berkeley on the Trinity, where talk of Father, Son and Spirit became an exhortation to lead sober, righteous and godly lives, was too innovative even for Wishart. Berkeley had weakened his Design argument by reducing it to the metaphor of a language of vision. "What Christian Writer would ever have laid the chief Stress of the Evidence of the *Being of a God*, the Foundation of all Religion, upon a meer Figure or Metaphor?" But here at least, Wishart missed the point: Berkeley had been addressing the freethinker who was so sceptical about signs of design that he accepted in evidence *only* the hard linguistic signs by which we detect human rationality; Berkeley's claim was that, even with such an artificial restriction on the terms of



argument he could still meet the freethinker's challenge since God "speaks" to us through nature in a structured way. One perhaps surprising feature of Wishart's pamphlet, given his own familiarity with London society, is his criticism of Berkeley for deriving his picture of freethinking from an acquaintance with coffeehouse discourse.<sup>28</sup>

Wishart was interested in literary technique, and particularly the use of dialogue which he first seriously studied in the work of Shaftesbury. He criticized the dialogue style of *Alciphron*, finding it inconsistent, tendentious, and a poor imitation of its Platonic model. A few months earlier, however, he had warmly commended the *Dialogue on Devotion, after the Manner of Xenophon* by Thomas Amory, tutor at the Taunton academy.<sup>29</sup> Thomas Birch kept a transcription of their correspondence (relating to Section VI of Amory's *Dialogue*) in the papers he bequeathed to the British Museum, but only the opening leaves appear to survive. This is enough, however, to see that Wishart was one of a number of eighteenth-century divines who revived the old debate on the petitionary function of prayer. He takes, to an extreme, the Christian Stoic view found also in Benson and Leechman, that in a divinely ordered world the efficacy of prayer lies not in securing a desired deviation from the established order of things, but in accustoming the individual to his or her dependence upon that order as the best total order for humanity. Virtually dismissing the notion of particular or special providence, Wishart suggests:

The Governor of the World does not act by occasional or arbitrary steps, so as we can suppose him ready to answer the Requests or petitions offered to him by his Creatures, but by stated Laws, or constant regular Methods, wisely fix'd, upon a clear View of what in every Circumstance is best in the whole, & steadily kept to: Nor can we suppose he will alter one Step of his well chosen Course, to comply with the Opinions, or gratify the Desires of any imperfect & shortsighted Creatures.

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<sup>28</sup> On the significance of coffeehouse philosophy, see D. Berman, *George Berkeley, Idealism and the Man* (Oxford, 1994), 78-9, 164-6.

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix, letter 3. Roger Flexman in his funeral sermon on Amory (1774) made the unlikely claim that Wishart had maintained against Amory a Calvinist view of predestination. On the surviving evidence this is plainly wrong, as is Flexman's identification of predestination with "fate".



The universality of God's laws for corporeal nature is "generally acknowledged by the best Philosophers", and is the basis of our ability to apply "Observation & Experience" in pursuing our ends. It is no reason to sit back and let nature take over. Wishart, anticipating the later views of Hume and Kames, finds comparable "Methods as fixed & steady" in the operations of the mind. He believes, however, that from seeking through prayer for a proper understanding of these powers of nature, we can make practical progress to the "Wisdom & Virtue" that we seek.

#### IV

When Wishart came back to Edinburgh as University Principal in 1737, he foresaw that he would face a challenge, but not that it would take him two years and a sustained pamphlet war to defeat the opposition of the local presbytery to his obtaining preaching engagements in the city.<sup>30</sup> Although a majority of the city ministers supported a call to Wishart, a majority in the presbytery were persuaded to oppose it. Their leaders whipped up hostility in the vacant parishes, and sought to gerrymander the vote by dictating how the electors should conduct it. The electors protested that they were being imposed on to act unconstitutionally, and that "no Power whatsoever can be justified in restraining the natural Liberties of Mankind, far less in abridging their establish'd Rights and Privileges, without a just Cause and evident Utility" (*Case*, 3). But the presbytery would try any means they could to block someone whose publications, they thought, were "contrary to the established Doctrines of this Church". "We know that these Errors are very fashionable among some young Sparks, who give themselves Airs, and pretend to have a polite Taste" (*Reply*, 21). They knew Wishart's reputation but were too indiscriminating in tracing his views

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<sup>30</sup> For representative documents, see *The Case of the Magistrates, Town-Council, and Others, Callers of the Reverend Mr. Wishart ... Appellants, the Reverend Presbytery of Edinburgh, Respondents* (1737); *The Presbytery of Edinburgh's Reply to the Case of the Magistrates and Town Council of Edinburgh in the Affair of Mr. William Wishart* (1737); *Answers for William Wishart ... to the Charge Exhibited against him before the Rev. Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale* (1738); and *The Principles of Liberty of Conscience Stated and Defended* (1739), the last published by Wishart under the pseudonym Gwitmarpscheldon.

to the totality of “the Earl of *Shaftsbury*’s Scheme and that of *Libertines*, *Freethinkers* and *Deists*, such as *Collins*, *Tindal*, *Tolland*, *Woolston*, and the Author of a Book intituled *The Independent Whig*. Their most curious charge was that Wishart was “a Follower and Disciple of Mr. *Hobbes*, and one of the highest *Libertine* Principles”, because he allowed that the magistrate had the right to enforce the law against “the publishing of Opinions, that are contrary to those which are established and received by the Society, as a Part of their Civil Constitution”. They saw that as invalidating much that they were proud of in the history of the church – and seemed not to realize that this had been achieved by violence.

Wishart vigorously defended his views on education and conscience, reiterating his insistence on the magistrate’s maintaining the natural and civil liberties and privileges of the citizens; in particular, their exercise of the “natural and unalienable” right of conscience, without which there could be no virtue. He insisted nevertheless that conscience is not a pretext for committing an act by which our neighbours are injured, or *their* natural or civil rights violated, or the peace of society threatened; and he granted that there can be forms of religious deviation that infringe the civil law on one or more of these counts. Wishart was targeting the use of the civil law to enforce, and to punish the infringement of, restrictions that it is a misuse of magisterial power and authority to require; whereas the presbytery saw him as mounting a direct assault on the Confession. The interpretation of chapters 20 and 23 of the Confession (“Of Christian liberty, and liberty of conscience”, and “Of the civil magistrate”) was particularly at issue. Wishart was finally vindicated by the superior Synod.

Consistently with this stance, and despite being himself to some degree a beneficiary of the practice, Wishart was opposed to the political management of church appointments, whether this came in the form of direct or indirect Crown patronage, or through nomination by church officers who were themselves political appointees, or directly through the magistrate. In the election of one’s ministers, as in the election of one’s governors, there is a natural right to representation, although the eighteenth century did not conceive representation in terms of a universal suffrage. Wishart, like Hutcheson, accepted the heritor system whereby persons of substance and moral authority in the community reached an informed decision on a suitable candidate from

knowledge of local needs. They were open to external advice, but not to dictation. Wishart did not look for confrontation, but where parishes themselves resisted external dictation he was ready to support them. He wrote to Benson in 1742, "I am at present in greatest favour with those called our *Strict Folks*; having lately joined with them (or headed them) in opposing some forward measures of our court divines, in imposing ministers on reluctant congregations, upon presentations; and this I did upon the principles of liberty and rights of mankind".<sup>31</sup> Nine years later, in the period of the debates on the Torphichen and Inverkeithing settlements and the crisis that led to the formation of the Relief Church, he sent a report to John Ward of Gresham College on events in the latest General Assembly and attached the comment, "I own it gave no small joy to me, to be able to lead 20 of the highest presbyterians in our Kirk to so open a Declaration of these glorious principles for which some years ago I was prosecuted: & by some of these very men too".<sup>32</sup>

In both cases the wording is significant: it shows that Wishart is giving leadership to a group of which he is *not* a natural member, "our Strict Folks", "the highest presbyterians in our Kirk", that is, the orthodox Calvinist or evangelical section. This has to be stressed in view of John McIntosh's significant study that in other respects admirably sums up Wishart's leading ideas and impact.<sup>33</sup> He represents Wishart as not just an undoubted influence on, but as an actual member of, something that can be called the "Popular party" in the church. But on McIntosh's own admission, there was no "party" in the sense of a coordinated, organized movement. There was a convergence of disparate interests over one single issue, against the genuinely cohesive alliance of the Moderate party. The convergence was from opposite motives. The evangelicals opposed political control because it resulted

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<sup>31</sup> *Biographia Britannica*, 2nd edn., article "Benson".

<sup>32</sup> British Library, Add. MS 6211, folio 226. This is from a deposit of 13 letters from Wishart to Ward, with several replies. Wishart broke with the Argathelians on this issue. It was the subject of an offensive comment by Hew Dalrymple, Lord Drummore, to Lord Milton, when the search was on for a successor after Wishart's death (NLS, Saltoun papers, SB/80, 11 Dec. 1753). Dalrymple saw Wishart as the one recent Principal who was of no weight in ecclesiastical affairs – meaning that his weight was on the wrong side.

<sup>33</sup> J.R. McIntosh, *Church and theology in Enlightenment Scotland* (East Linton, 1998).



in appointments for non-spiritual reasons; they were particularly apprehensive about the dilution of the divine message as they conceived it, through the importation of liberal ideas. Wishart had no reason to complain of the ideas, but objected to the principle of imposing a minister against the wishes and conscience of those among whom he had to minister. So Wishart supported on moral grounds what his opponents sought on theological grounds, and considered the principle that united them more important than the theology that divided them. It is harking back to the debates of his student days, and the right to representation of those who accept discipline. But comparable issues arose also in an academic context closer to home. The Senate minutes of 17 December 1741 show that, when Edinburgh Town Council presumed to nominate two professors without regard for the rights of the university, "the Principall in his own name, and in the names of his Bretheren Professors in this University" made a formal complaint, only accepting the appointments after subjecting the candidates to examination. "They found themselves obliged to insist, that this should be no Precedent in prejudice of their right in trying Persons chosen to the like Offices in time coming, and rejecting any who, upon such tryal, should be found insufficient."

That Wishart remained in other respects out of sympathy with those he supported on the patronage question is shown by his response to Doddridge's eulogy on James Gardiner of 1747. Gardiner, a reformed rake, had died through foolhardy heroism at Prestonpans. Doddridge, who had known him well and respected the sincerity of his conversion, felt he was insufficiently honoured at home and published a tribute which, among other things, cited Gardiner's condemnation of current trends in the church. Taking up Doddridge's claim that Gardiner "looked upon the Murtherers of Reputation and Usefulness, as some of the vilest Pests of Society", Wishart retorted the charge against Doddridge himself. He thought Doddridge was endorsing the suggestion that some clergy had "found expedients to quiet their consciences" in subscribing the formularies required of them, particularly in respect of the Trinity and doctrines relating to grace, conversion and salvation. Wishart denied there were any such ministers, but at the same time identified the group who were undoubtedly being targeted by the charge: "those who have most strenuously set themselves to promote real Virtue, and practical



Christianity, in Opposition to that gloomy and savage *Enthusiasm*, which has, of late, made fierce Inroads among us”.

Doddridge sent a response to another minister, Alexander Webster, a strong supporter of the revivalism that Wishart scorned, with the request that Webster place it in the Edinburgh newspapers. Webster dissuaded him, suggesting that “every sober minded man” in Edinburgh considered the critic to be “beneath your notice”, and that all such “enemies of the Grace of God” were “stingless insects”.<sup>34</sup> Webster nevertheless thought Doddridge correct in his accusations, and might have felt subsequently vindicated if he had known the ambivalent terms of Wishart’s offer to Ward of an LL.D. degree in 1751.

You are also to subscribe it at bottom, inserting the date of Your subscription; & get Dr Avery, & any other freind, to witness it. T’is against the present mind of many of our Society to have any such formula; or even to refuse that Degree to a Sober & learned Papist: but this is pinned down upon us by Ancient Rules; & is withal so Catholick, that I hope You’ll have no scruple to subscribe it: & I flatter myself You will not refuse the highest Honour we can conferr, so cordially offered You.<sup>35</sup>

Ward was indeed delighted with the honour, and so signed, and yet Wishart’s English Dissenting friends, ministerial and lay alike, would mostly have been nonsubscribers by conviction. One such was the Socinian or Arian Benson, whose admission of friendship also with Doddridge and, when alive, Gardiner came as a shock to Wishart in 1748, and forced him to lie low over his own authorship of the hostile tract: “I have never seen any answer to Dr D[oddrid]ge’s account of C[olonel] G[ardiner], save a reproof for his attack on the Subscribing Clergy, written here by a Lay hand: but I am a litle surprized at the great Doctor’s intimacy with You; & even at Your mentioning the C[olonel] as Your Freind”.<sup>36</sup> Otherwise, Wishart in the same letter remains out of sympathy with much of Scottish theology. He pins his hopes on the young generation, whom he instructs in “the Principles of

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<sup>34</sup> Wishart, *A Letter to the Reverend Dr. Doddridge* (Edinburgh, 1747); *Correspondence of Doddridge*, v, 32-5, 72. In happier times, Wishart collected subscriptions for Doddridge’s Family Expositor: see *Correspondence*, iii, 424.

<sup>35</sup> Add. MS 6211, folios 221-2.

<sup>36</sup> See Appendix, letter 4.

Natural Religion & Morality, with other things preparatory to a critical search of the Scriptures”, and steers as best he can towards the liberal scholarship coming up from the south. He does so, regardless of the fact that many of them would accept the patronage system. In the same letter, however, Wishart reveals that metaphysics is not his strong point. He urges Benson to remove from his *Sermons* “a little hint, out of my reach, about Space”. Like Newton, Benson identifies one of God’s attributes with im-mensity, or the necessary infinity of space. For God is omnipresent, and if space were bounded, its bounds “must have some space to exist in”.

The devotional works that Wishart subsidized for publication were stylish but inexpensive reissues of classic works, primarily for divinity students. He expended special effort on the edition of Volusenus. This was a neo-Stoic tract that advocated tranquillity through reason, and Wishart took pains to have Ward check and correct the text. Scougal he recommended to a wider readership, including the poor of his and others’ congregations. It is another work aimed at attuning the mind to the divine dispensation. He commends it both as a guide to attaining “true Piety and Goodness” and for its author’s concentration on the heart of religion, free of disputed issues and of “the Fierceness of our Contentions and Animosities about things of lesser Moment”. Scougal’s work anticipates several key themes of Hutcheson’s philosophy and it is easy to see why it appealed to Wishart. Scougal extols “the excellency of universal Charity and Love” and the pleasure that attends them. “The Character of any excellent Person whom we have never seen, will many Times engage our Hearts, and make us hugely concerned in all his Interests. ... We either see or apprehend some Greatness of mind, or Vigour of Spirit, or Sweetness of Disposition; some Spriteliness, or Wisdom, or Goodness, which charm our Spirit, and command our Love”; and to the extent that we detect God’s features in nature in the same way, there are premonitions here also of Berkeley.

In his introduction to Whichcote, Wishart again finds in his subject themes germane to his own philosophy. Whichcote presents “the Evidences of vital and practical Religion ... not handling the Speculative Doctrines in any other Light, than with regard to their Practical Tendency, and their Influence on the Heart and Life”.

He ... Shows with most unquestionable Evidence, that the Difference betwixt Virtue and Vice, is as fixt and certain, as immutable and unalterable by any Power whatsoever; as that betwixt Light and Darkness: That real Virtue has an Happiness inherent, a Satisfaction naturally flowing from it, transcending all other Enjoyments: ... Building on such sure Foundations; With what Clearness and Strength of Argument does he establish the Evidences of natural Religion; and show its Agreeableness to the Principles of God's Creation in us; and that it is a thing (in his emphatick Phrase) Man is *made* to know: And then shows the Suitableness of the Principles of revealed Religion, and the Discoveries of the Gospel, to the lapsed and fallen Condition of Man. ... And, as all along he points at Practice, ... what excellent Directions does he give, for attaining the several Branches of true Piety and Virtue? How particularly does he enter into the most important Parts and Duties of common Life? How closely does he apply heavenly Truth to its proper Purpose, the purifying and improving the Heart of man? How clearly does he set forth true Religion as a *liberal Service* animated by Love? (pp. v-vii)

Wishart concludes by citing Robert Fleming's *The Confirming Work of Religion* (1685). Fleming had been a Scots divine at Rotterdam who had also taught the foundations of natural and revealed religion and emphasized the ineradicable sense of good and evil and of their "essential difference". But Wishart cites him especially for views that anticipate Locke, and Wishart himself, on the ignorance underlying sectarian education, in which beliefs instilled across the generations arise only through "the Customes and language of their Country", with no grasp of the rational grounds of those beliefs.

We are now in a position to reconsider the best documented episode in Wishart's later career: his success in eliminating Hume's candidacy for the moral philosophy chair at Edinburgh when the Town Council called in the city ministers for their *avisamentum*. There is little to add to what I have already published on the events themselves, but the affair must be seen against the background of Wishart's full career and interests. Wishart would have loved to have the job himself, and to restore it to the status of a chair in applied natural theology within the

Christian Stoic tradition. That was the foremost love of his life, his reading and his teaching, and it was how he had been brought up to understand moral philosophy. When it became obvious that this was not to be, and the party lines hardened round the candidacies of Hume and William Cleghorn, Wishart saw in Hume a degree of “danger to the Society” (i.e. the university) that justified the suspension of any benevolent affections. He threw his support behind William Cleghorn, the ultimately successful candidate, and prepared for his fellow ministers six documented objections to the philosophy of Books I and III of Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature*. We know of these through the *Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh* (1745) that Henry Home (later Lord Kames) put together and published just before the ministers’ decisive vote.<sup>37</sup> From the form in which they survive, we can see that Wishart’s “broken Citations”, as Hume called them, supported one complaint against Hume’s scepticism in general, three against the implications of his philosophy for natural religion, one against his pneumatology or theory of spiritual substances, and one against his account of morality and the virtues. This is a representative spread across the topics of the moral philosophy curriculum as Wishart and his contemporaries conceived it. It involved an attempt to match the text to Hume’s reputation, without any understanding of a philosophy whose sources and direction lay outside Wishart’s normal terms of reference. Though he identified sceptical and Epicurean currents in Hume’s work, he failed entirely to see its ultimately constructive character. In this, Wishart was at one with all those who shared with him the prevailing philosophical position.

Hume received regular bulletins on the course of the campaign to appoint him. That Wishart was heading the opposition is clear as much from his own testimony as from Hume’s.<sup>38</sup> Whether the six accusations and the documentation supporting them were the critical factor in Hume’s defeat, we cannot establish. Hume believed they were, and that public opinion went against him because of them. That Wishart was the recognized source of a “Charge” that was supported by “perverting and

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<sup>37</sup> The *Letter* consists in two documents somewhat crudely cobbled together: Wishart’s accusations, and the response Hume sent to ex-Provost John Coutts, in which the third-person references to Hume will be Kames’s editing of a private letter written in the first person.

<sup>38</sup> See the appendix to Stewart, *The Kirk and the Infidel*.



misrepresenting" Hume's words in the narrative that Kames published, is clear from Hume's letter distancing himself from the publication.<sup>39</sup> Since the "Sum of the Charge" there mirrors the "Specimen" that precedes it and (barring misprints) reproduces the same references, both must ultimately emanate from the same opponent; and enough reading notes survive among Wishart's papers to show that the style of quotation and referencing is characteristically his.

Hume's candidacy was always going to be problematic, and it is unlikely that he would have had backing from Kames if there had not been some philosophical rapport between them. When, therefore, Kames's *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*, which is in large part a critique of Hume's philosophy, appeared in 1751, orthodox divines saw little to choose between the two thinkers. But the more enlightened would recognize that they were in different camps. Kames was engaged on the same kind of programme as themselves, of accommodating new thinking to traditional belief, and it is not hard to see why he would subsequently find points of intellectual contact with Thomas Reid and his circle. Wishart, who kept abreast of the literature in his favourite study, would have been immediately attracted to Kames's title. His notes on the book survive. He was not hostile to it as he had been to Hume, although he did correctly record that Kames had no understanding of Berkeley's metaphysics.

Wishart mostly provides a commentary on the theological ramifications of Kames's philosophy. Two matters in particular catch his attention. One is the way in which Kames's theism relies on a principle of universal causation derived from sense and feeling instead of demonstration. We must suppose that Hume's aggressive scepticism had caused Wishart to miss *his* empirical account of the same principle because Hume studiously avoided its cosmological applications.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *New Letters of David Hume*, edd. R. Klibansky and E.C. Mossner (Oxford, 1954), 15. Wishart's authorship is questioned by P. Russell, "Wishart, Baxter and Hume's Letter from a Gentleman", *Hume Studies*, 23 (1997), 245-76. His objections to the plain sense of Hume's letter to Kames are captious and his strategy largely pyrrhonian; his alternative hypothesis is a fantasy, based on an exaggerated view that Hume's accuser must have been narrowly fixated on the thought of Clarke.

<sup>40</sup> Kames, though he explicitly says that Clarke had been in a muddle in trying to demonstrate the causal principle, was covered by his alternative route

Wishart also comments on Kames's controversial "feeling" of liberty. He accepts this without the need to construe it as a false signal. Wishart is back with the subject of his early correspondence with Amory, where he developed the same line that he would now find in Kames about the law-governed character of physical and mental (Kames calls it "moral") nature. In identifying voluntary action with a moral or voluntary (Wishart calls it "rational") necessity, a sequence that follows consistently but without constraint from the directions of an ordering mind, Kames has asserted nothing that Wishart wants to contest.<sup>41</sup>

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## APPENDIX

**1. Wishart to Viscount Molesworth, 13 Oct. 1722.** National Library of Ireland, microfilm neg. 4082; published by permission of Martin Townsend, the last owner of the original.

My Lord

I am Embolden'd to give You this Trouble, by the Kind Salutation You was pleased to Honour me with, in Yours to Mr Turnbull.<sup>42</sup> I hope Your Lordship will not take it amiss that he communicated Your Letter to me: I'm sure the Genuine Picture it set before me of a Thorow Honest Mind afforded me a Pleasure; which I dare say That Honest

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to theism. But Hume's scepticism looked to Wishart like practical atheism. Reason, Wishart had said in his Charity sermon, was given to us to fit means to ends in the affairs of life, and not "to try our wit and exercise our penetration, or to train us up to be exquisite or subtile Metaphysicians" (p. 29). But Hume tried to shrug off his sceptical exercises as "a mere Philosophical Amusement, or Trial of *Wit and Subtilty*" (*Letter from a Gentleman*, 20). Wishart concentrated especially on those of Hume's avowals which appeared to undermine the ordered mental picture of oneself and one's relations to the rest of the rational order, since that picture was central to his own account of how we engage in moral reflection (Charity sermon, 5-9).

<sup>41</sup> A much shorter version of this narrative formed the basis of one of my Gifford Lectures at the University of Aberdeen in 1995.

<sup>42</sup> On George Turnbull, see references in the text, and my entry in *Dictionary of eighteenth-century British philosophers*, edd. J.W. Yolton and others, 2 vols. (Bristol, 1999), ii, 900-904.

Mind cannot Envy me. Nor, I hope, will You blame me, My Lord, that I am Forward to get into so Worthy & Honourable an Acquaintance; to which I thought I had some fair Opportunity of introducing myself. Could I flatter myself that my Attainments in Virtue were Equal to my sincere Aims; I should perhaps have the Boldness, to claim that Happiness, as in some sort my Right: for I look on the Honourable & Happy Society of the Virtuous as no inconsiderable Share of the Proper & Natural Rewards of Virtue: And, as an Agreement of Minds in that Worthy Character is indeed the Noblest Foundation of Freindship & Familiarity; there is perhaps in this Respect some Sort of Equality produc'd by Virtue in those who are possess't of it, of whatever Different Ranks in the World; which removes that forbidding Distance which Superior Quality does in other Cases oppose to the Approach of Persons of Inferior Rank. But, My Lord, I am apprehensive of some other Bar in the present Case: for I fear I may indeed be Asham'd to Show Myself to Your Lordship; after the Picture, perhaps too Advantageous for me, which my Kind Freind was pleas'd to give You of me. But my Forwardness to Grasp the Blessing surmounts this Fear: & I am further Encouraged by the Sense of that Condescension & Generosity, which makes so Bright a Part of Your Lordship's Character; & Softens the Rigour of Your Other Virtues.

I have the Happiness to Share with Your Lordship in the Joy You have Conceiv'd from the Dawnings of a Revival of Ancient Virtue & the Love of True Liberty; particularly in this Country. I do indeed think the Proofs of that Noble Spirit which the Learned Youth of the University of Glasgow, some of whom I have the Happiness to be acquainted with, have lately given deserve Commendation; as I'm sure they Reckon they have no Small Reward in the Applauses with which Your Lordship has been Pleas'd to Honour them. 'Tis with Pleasure too I can inform Your Lordship, that Several Others of my Acquaintance in this City & some other Places of this Country, & even some Few of my Own Coat, are heartily Attach't to the Noble Cause of Virtue Truth & Liberty.

I'm sensible, My Lord, of the Justness of an Observation I meet with in a Work ascrib'd to Your Lordship, & which You seem to hint at in Your Letter to my Freind; concerning the very Different Effects of the Education of the Youth & the Conduct of the People being under the Influence of Philosophers; & under that of some Persons of quite

another Stamp, who, for Decency's sake, shall be nameless.<sup>43</sup> But, My Lord, I scarce know a better Remedy that can be apply'd in this Case, as Matters now stand; than if the Gentlemen of that Numerous Tribe can be brought to become Philosophers; & to Imitate those who of Old obtain'd that Name, from their Instructing the Youth & the People in Social Virtue; in an Affection to the Welfare of their Neighbours, of their Country, & of Mankind. A Notable instance of this Sort I think we had in the Late Arch-Bishop of Cambray;<sup>44</sup> of whose Noble Work I have lately seen so Just a Commendation in a Paper I read with great Pleasure, I mean Cato's Letter in the London Journal of September 8th.<sup>45</sup> 'Tis with great Satisfaction I have for some Years past observ'd the Breaking forth of some good Dispositions the same way, in England & elsewhere. This affords me some Hope, that if the Friends of Liberty could prevail, to get those Restraints taken away, which have for a Long time hinder'd Philosophy from being a Free Commerce; & have render'd it indeed a Despised Traffick, under heavy Taxes & Embargo's; This might Contribute not a little, to promote the Worthy Design I have been speaking of. But perhaps, My Lord, this Project is a little Romantick, & has something of Enthusiasm in it; or at least the Execution of it is more to be Wish't than Hop'd for. Perhaps, too, it is not the Most Perfect Virtue which wants to have those Restraints & Tentations removed in order to it's freely Exerting itself. But still, My Lord, 'tis of Use to Cherish & Encourage any faint Beginnings of Virtue: by this means the true Sense of it may be, at least gradually, Reviv'd; & a more Perfect Pitch of it may, in Time, prevail. Besides, My Lord, As the Instances of a Very Perfect Virtue are now become Very Rare; So I'm apt to think it may be Question'd, whether the Principles of Virtue oblige a man to lay Open Strong Truths to Weak Eyes: & to run the Hazard of being ever after depriv'd of Access to Act, in a Certain Way, for the Interests of Goodness; for the Satisfaction of Once in his Life Openly contradicting some Received & Establish't Prejudices, when no Good is to be done by it. I doubt This, if Rightly consider'd, will hardly be found more Honest, than it is Prudent; & can scarce be reckon'd any thing better than Downright Enthusiasm: & I am apt to believe, 'twere better for men, in this Case, e'en to Keep their

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<sup>43</sup> The clergy.

<sup>44</sup> Fénelon.

<sup>45</sup> If Wishart was attributing this to Molesworth, he was wrong.



Virtue to themselves; so far as Quietly to Pay the Dutys & Taxes the Publick think Fit to Exact of them, for their Share of the Commerce; or, if they have any Unenterable Goods to Run, manage the matter with Proper Secrecy. I doubt not, My Lord, some might Reckon this a very Bold Stroke: & indeed, if I am in the Wrong in this Matter, I have let CATO know the Weakness of my Soul; I have fairly laid Open to Your Lordship, at the very First Interveiw, the Only Spice of Knavery I know in my Constitution: but I'm the less inclin'd to Repent of this, as a Rash Step; that I'm e'en Willing to Submitt this Weakness, if it be One, to Your Lordship's Admonition & Correction.

My Business, My Lord, for some time past has been to Preach Once every Sunday, to a small Audience in this City; where my Obligations to my Parents confine me: This is All the Clergy-business I have any Concern in. But Oh! My Lord, I find this a Low Sphere; & where I have but little Prospect of doing any Considerable Good. But, as I would much more Willingly Entertain Your Lordship with Good Tydings, than Burden You with Complaints; 'Tis with Pleasure I can tell You, that, Thank Heaven, I may, even Here, Adventure to Say & to Inculcate, "That Religion is Virtue & Charity; that the promoting of These is the Great Design of CHRISTIANITY; & that the Perfection of Those Noble Qualitys is the Cheif Ingredient in That Happiness & those Rewards by which It animates us:" Such Principles as These I have often the Pleasure of Inculcating with All the Force I am Able. But Alass! My Lord, what Benefite can be Expected from a Half-hour's Set Discourse in a Week, delivered by One whose Talents, if he may boast of having Any, lye only in the Narrative or Didactick Way; & whose Genius does not lead him to Sett off a Discourse with those Ornaments of a Popular Eloquence that are so Requisite to Work on the Hearts of the Multitude? What Good I say, My Lord, can one Hope to do by this means, amongst Common People, Educated & Grown up, nay Grown Old, in Prejudices & Enthusiasm! The Abettors of Savage Zeal, Feirce Bigottry, and Dire Superstition, have the Advantage of those Corrupt Passions & Inveterate Prejudices of men's Minds, to Favour their Designs; which, at the same time, Create the greatest Rubbs in the Way of those, who would Instruct men in True Virtue; Recommend to them a Pure & Peacable religion; & Teach them a Rational Service.

But, what do I Complain of the Unsuccessfulness of My Poor Attempts? when I have in my View the CATO of Our Age & Country, after the Toil of Many Years employ'd in Wrestling with Vice & Faction, Spent! Overpower'd! Despairing of having further Access to Act for the benefite of His Country in a Legal Way! Depress'd with the Burthen of Publick Cares & Greifs; & with the Additional Weight of Age & Frailty! OH! My Lord, This Thought Swells my Heart; & Prompts me to say a great Many Passionate things: but I must Suppress them.

'Tis time now to put ane End to this Tedious Letter. And, after having so long followed the Impulse, which Your Lordship's Supposed Presence (Attended with All that Easiness Candour & Humanity with which I know You to be Adorn'd) gave me, to Use a great deal of Freedom & Familiarity; it becomes me now to Imploy the Image of the Great Man, Busied with Publick Cares, to give Check to my Luxuriant Pen.

I can scarce have the Confidence to desire Your Lordship would be at the Trouble of making a Return to this Scribble: but You may be sure 'tis ane Honour I'll be very Proud of: &, if Your Lordship's more Important Concerns should allow You to Grant it me; Please inclose it in a Cover to, my Good Freind, Mr George Young Chirurgion at Dr Pitcairn's head in the Landmarket Edinburgh.

I would Gladly know of Any thing Your Lordship has Publish't. I have lately read An Account of Denmark as it was in the Year 1692; which Common Fame & the Title page of the French Translation lead me to Ascribe to You: from which I am Perswaded Your Works would be of Great Use to Cherish & Improve in me any Litle Taste of Virtue & Liberty I have got; which I Cheifly Owe to the Incomparable Writings of My Favourite Author, Your Lordship's Late Excellent & Noble Freind.

If there is Any Thing in which I can Serve Your Lordship here. I beg You would Honour me with Your Commands; & Indulge my sincerest Ambition, to be

My Lord

Your Lordship's most humble & devoted servant

WILL: WISHART

Edinburgh. October 13th 1722.

2. Wishart to Viscount Molesworth, 7 Nov. 1723. Source and permission as above.

My Lord

T'is now several Months since I had the Honour of Your Lordship's most Kind & Obliging Letter of the 18th of January. I did indeed on purpose delay for some time making a return to it, that I might be able to give Your Lordship some account, according to my Promise, of the Use I had made of Your Advices & Instructions: & this much I understand my good Freind Mr Arbuckle<sup>46</sup> did, at my desire, express to Your Lordship. Some Months agoe, viz in the beginning of Aprile, when I was just sitting down to perform this, I was call'd up in great haste to this place, [annot. in marg. London.] to attend my Uncle the Late Admiral Wishart,<sup>47</sup> who was then a-dying; & have been so closely engaged, in attending upon him till his Death, & since that in the ordering & setling of his Affairs, that I have scarce had leizure so much as to Think of Any thing else: & 'tis with great pleasure I embrace the opportunity of the first vacant moments I can have, to make my gratefull acknowledgements to Your Lordship for Your great & Condescending Favours; & to lay before You the Improvement, such as it is, which I have made of them.

And now that I am sett down to it, it puts me to the blush to think of writing to Your Lordship when I see You expressing a doubt if any thing of Yours can be reckon'd worth the small Time & Money I bestow upon Your Letters. Belive me, My Lord, I should reckon it well worth my while, & much more money than ever Your Lordship's Letters can cost me, only to hear now & then of the continuance of a Life in which I reckon myself so deeply interested, as I am a Lover of Virtue & of Mankind; not to speak of the particular Acquaintance Your Lordship has been pleas'd to Honour me with: yet should I not give Your Lordship any further trouble of this kind, but even satisfy myself with hearing some other way how it is with You, did I not think I have

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<sup>46</sup> On Arbuckle, see *Dictionary of eighteenth-century British philosophers*, i, 28-30.

<sup>47</sup> Sir James Wishart, d. 1723. Wishart inherited his uncle's estate near Bedale, North Yorkshire. His fondness for it was later cited as a factor counting against his candidacy for the Edinburgh moral philosophy chair.

reason to promise myself much more benefite from Your Lordship's Replys than You can have by my Letters: Thus far I am willing to own I am Selfish; but I hope 'tis the BETTER SELF prevails with me. But Modesty, I see, is so much the Character of Truly Great Minds, that they are frequently possess't of it even to a Weakness: I must beg Your Lordship's Pardon if I am not able to put another Construction on Your Lordship's insinuating to me that You never was equal to the task of instructing others; especially when You own, almost in the same sentence, that You taught the Incomparable SHAFTSBURY.

You do me Justice, My Lord, in beliving that I would not be guilty of any thing so Base, especially towards Your Lordship, AS WILLINGLY LAYING A TRAP FOR YOU TO HEAR WHAT YOU WOULD SAY, WOUND UP BY COMMENDATION: nor do I find myself disappointed in the expectations I had of hearing Something from Your Lordship suitable to the Character I had conceiv'd of You; nor have You at all lessen'd Yourself in my Opinion, but on the contrary have recommended Yourself more to my Esteem, by Your last Favours. And, tho I can't suspect Your Lordship of so Mean a thing as a design to Flatter, when You tell me I SEEM TO HAVE ALREADY GONE BEYOND THE STRETCH OF YOUR LINE, when You talk of PRESCRIBING RUDIMENTS TO EXPERIENCED ARTISTS, & of FOOLISHLY TELLING ME BUT WHAT I KNOW BETTER THAN YOU DO; yet I am perswaded the account I am now to give You of myself, with respect to those studys Your Lordship is so kind as to give me Your assistance in, will abundantly convince You what a mistake You have been in. I take it as an extraordinary Favour that Your Lordship has condescended to converse with me upon other terms than You would think it prudent to do with the world; & to honour me with the Title of a Freind, from whom You would not conceal Your Temper or Your Parts: & I shall show You how Obliging this Openness is to me, by fairly appearing before Your Lordship as I am at my worst; & tho by this I doubt not I shall lessen the Opinion You have conceiv'd of my Learning, yet I hope I shall show a Sincere and ingenuous disposition.

Alass! My Lord, I have arriv'd at a considerable Age, almost the Half of Your Lordship's; & am so far from being Learned, that all I dare boast of is an Honest turn of Mind, something of a Taste & relish of what is Good & excellent, with a Disposition to learn & improve: my



Genius indeed is not much turn'd for what is commonly call'd Learning, or a knowledge of a Variety of Authors & Subjects, good & bad; but rather, as I told Your Lordship in my last, for digesting a Few: for which reason, since I began to think for myself, I have been always ambitious to improve rather in good sense, than in Learning. But I regrette mightily an unacquaintedness with the Learn'd Languages, the Greek & Latin; those great Fountains of Wisdom & good Sense, especially in Morals. In Latin, indeed, my Lord, I can read any Prose Author with ease & pleasure; but it is not without difficulty & some helps too that I am able to enter into the several beautys & Fine Sentiments of a Virgil, a Horace, or especially a Persius; & I cannot speak or write any thing tollerably in that Language: but alas! the Greek I am almost wholly ignorant of; having never at first been well taught the Elements of it, nor any Author in it but the New Testament; & from this wrong step at the first, not having pleasure in it, I have wretchedly neglected it; & have spent my time in other studys more agreeable, but upon reflection I am afraid not quite so profitable. Your Lordship will see now what a poor account I must be able to give You of my study in those noble authors who have writt in that Language, which can amount to no more than this, that I have read severals of them in English, French or Latin, with very great Satisfaction &, I think, improvement too: I have indeed been stir'd up of late to hammer at some of them in the Original; particularly that easy Author Epictetus, with some Dialogues of Plato; but alas, with so litle success, that I fear my loss now is irretrievable: & therefore I shall be glad to have Your Lordship's opinion, whether I shall lose much of the benefite of those excellent Authors by reading them only in translations? &, if Your Lordship's thoughts give me any encouragement in this way, if I know my heart which I have somewhat studyed, I don't desire it to flatter my Laziness; for what Labour I shall save from the Study of Words I am willing to bestow on the study of Things. Thus I have without reserve let Your Lordship into the true State of my Learning; that You may know whether, & how far, You may yet entertain any share of the high Ideas & big Hopes You had conceiv'd of me.

But, now to come closser to my first design, of giving Your Lordship some account what use I have made of Your excellent Instructions since I had the favour of them. I had never since I was a Schoolboy read any thing of our incomparable Buchannan, except some

of his beautiful Poems; but by the Encomium You gave Him I was put upon reading his *Peice de Jure Regni apud Scotos*: I was mightily instructed & delighted with the Excellent notions he gives us of the Nature & Design of Government, & the Just Boundaries of it: what Masterly Strokes are there! how elegant & entertaining are his comparisons & Illustrations! how Beautiful & Agreeable is his Description of a Good King! how Just and how Ghastly is his Picture of a Tyrant. And what contributed a great deal to my Delight is the Dialogue way of Writing, so nearly resembling those Ancient Composures which Your Divine Pupil had train'd me to some Taste of: were the persons introduced in this *Peice* different from what they are, it might indeed, as the Noble Author I have last nam'd somewhere observes, justly appear a trespass against Nature & Probability for any Authors now-a-days to thrust so much Good Sense & so well-connected into One Conversation: but, when one considers that the Conversation is managed betwixt Buchannan & his Freind; this Improbability, methinks, evanishes; & the Picture appears Just, Natural, & Beautiful.

The Works of the Excellent Arch-Bishop Tillotson I have been well acquainted with for several Years; & have had the pleasure of reveiwing several of his Admirable Popular composures since I had the Honour of Your Lordship's Letter: I am exceedingly entertain'd with the Nobleness of his Sentiments, for the most part, & the Eligant Easy Dress he gives them; with the veiws He affords us of a Religion intirely calculated for the Benefite & Happiness of Mankind; & in fine, with his Vigorous Opposition, in the worst of times, to that great Enemy of Liberty of Conscience, *POPERY*: yet, if I may be allowed to censure so great a Man, I can't help thinking that even his Veiws of certain Dogmata are sometimes too Narrow, & too much inclined to the System; & that in handling the Nature & Grounds of Moral Virtue he does not go enough to the Bottom of things.

I have likeways read Machiavel's Discourses on T. Livius, together with the First Decade of that Admirable Historian; by which I have received a great deal of Light into the true Principles of Politicks: & I have the Happiness to agree with Your Lordship in the Character You give of that Great Man. I had only dipt into Harrington's Works & Confucius's Morals when I was disturbed from the Course of Study Your Lordship had been so kind as to put me into; & obliged soon after,

by my Uncle's death, to fall about business not so agreeable to my temper & genius: nor can I entertain any prospect of returning to my true Element till I am fairly settled again in this place (Edinburgh) whither I am now returned before I could get this far in my Letter to Your Lordship.

But, My Lord, we have a saying in this Country THAT THERE'S NE'ER A GREAT LOSS, BUT THERE'S SOME ADVANTAGE WITH IT: & the Concern Your Lordship is pleas'd to show for me perswades me it will be no disagreeable peice of News to You, that by my Uncle's death I am left Heir, after my Father, to ane Estate which is now about 400£, &, when Annuitys that at present go off it shall return to it, may be about 800£ a Year: I am perswaded Your Lordship will do me the Honour to bear a Share in the Joy I have on this occasion; while I can adventure to assure You it cheifly arises from the Prospect I have of being some time able, by this means, to do the more considerable Service to My Country, & to Mankind. But I must now beg pardon for the Confusedness of this Letter; which I have been obliged, thro a variety of less pleasing Avocations, to write by fragments & at considerable distances of time; nay, after the most of it had been writt at London, to finish it in this Place: if Your Lordship's leizure allows You to make me any return; & You chuse to make it only a Single Letter; Please direct it, without the Title of Revd (least it fall into another hand) to Mr William Wishart Junr at the Principal's house in the College of Edinburgh. I shall be very glad to know if, now that Your Lordship is unhappily kept out of the British Parliament, You find Yourself able to do any great Good in the Irish one. I have the Honour to be, with the most profound Respect & Gratitude,

My Lord

Your Lordship's most obliged

& most humble servant. WILL: WISHART

Edinburgh. November 7th 1723.

**3. Wishart to the Rev. Thomas Amory, 29 Oct. 1733 (incomplete).**  
British Library, Add. MS 6211, fo. 226; published by permission of the British Library.

London October 29 1733

Sir,

When I had the pleasure of perusing your excellent *Dialogue upon Devotion*,<sup>48</sup> I contented myself with giving my opinion of it to a worthy Friend of yours & mine, who first put it into my Hands. But having had occasion lately to take it up again, I thought it proper, especially for one reason, that will appear in the sequel of this Letter, to offer my thoughts concerning it, to your deliberate perusal, in this free manner; if perhaps I might contribute any thing to your Encouragement to go on in a Way you seem to be so particularly turn'd for, & to have succeeded so happily In.

I am sensible how vain a thing it might seem to talk of your deriving any Encouragement from me, did I not know, that to worthy & generous Minds like yours the Reflection on having contributed to the rational & virtuous Pleasure, & to the strengthening of the weak Virtue, of any of Mankind, must be not a little encouraging.

To proceed then, I am extremely pleas'd and much instructed by your admirable performance. Your preface is perfectly to the purpose. The ancient Dialogue between Socrates & Aristodemus seems to me the most proper Introduction, that could be thought of, to that you have composed between him & Alcibiades. I have compar'd it as well as I could with the Original; & the Translation appears to me so exact & close, & at the same time so free & easy, & so beautifully express'd, that I heartily wish you may find Leisure & Inclination to go on a little in that Way, & favour us with like elegant Versions of some of the most beautiful pieces of the noble Ancients. Give me leave particularly to recommend to you that admirable little piece, Cebes's *Table*.

Not that I would divert you from exercising and cultivating your own Vein; for I must acknowledge your own piece, that follow'd, gave me yet much greater Entertainment than your Translation. The Excellency of the Argument, the Justness of the Sentiments, the Beauty & Strength of the Style, the proper Choice & exact preservation on the Characters, & the just Imitation of the great Original, you had set before you, all conspir'd to charm me. I have read nothing with such Delight of a long time; & I think it has given me something better than a transient Pleasure too.

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<sup>48</sup> Published 1733. See text.



I can espy very few things in it, that to me have the Appearance of faults; but any thing of that sort I have found, I am sure I need make no Apology to a person of your turn of Mind for laying them freely before you.

The first Remark of that sort is but a trifling one; but I am fain to see so beautiful a Body free of the least spot. It is on p. 39. l. 17. where I cannot see what the Epithet *lesser* refers to, nor what it has to do there: And tho' the Expression of *the Deity's wisely retiring behind second Causes*, in the beginning of that Paragraph, appears to me a strong & beautiful one; yet methinks it occurs too soon a second time; & therefore I could wish, that in this second place there was some proper Alteration of the phrase, without changing the sense.

Pag. 41, 42 the Objection against Prayer is excellently answered, as it is stated, but I apprehend this Objection might be stronger or put in another light, so as to require some further Answer; thus: "The Governor of the World does not act by occasional or arbitrary steps, so as we can suppose him ready to answer the Requests or petitions offered to him by his Creatures, but by stated Laws, or constant regular Methods, wisely fix'd, upon a clear View of what in every Circumstance is best in the whole, & steadily kept to: Nor can we suppose he will alter one Step of his well chosen Course, to comply with the Opinions, or gratify the Desires of any imperfect & shortsighted Creatures. And therefore it would seem, that offering any Petitions to Heaven was absolutely to no purpose, seeing the Import of such petitions at bottom must be, either that he would go on in his stated Way, which he will equally do, whether we ask him, or not; or that he would alter it in some instance or other, which he is too wise & good to be induced to do by the most earnest Intreaties."

That the Matter of fact supposed is true with respect to the Divine Government of the Corporeal World, is generally acknowledged by the best Philosophers: And to me it is no less clear with respect to his Government of the Intellectual World, by Methods as fixed & steady, as those Laws of Nature are by which the Corporeal World is managed. This is somewhat different from the general Notion of God's always doing what is best *pro hic & nunc*. This he might be said to do, tho' in every Case he took his Measures, upon the spot, *consilium in arena*; & did not according to Foresight & a fixd plan laid down in the beginning. But allowing the Fact as I have stated it, the Objection against Prayer

for the Blessings of Wisdom & Virtue, may, I think, be clearly answered thus, “that any Event’s being brought about by stated Laws is so far from being an Argument *against* our using those Means, which are discovered by Observation & Experience to be the natural means of bringing it about, that it is an Argument *for* it: And in like manner, as the Motions of the several parts of the Corporeal World being according to the Law of Gravitation, instead of rendering needless or useless the Application of the mechanic powers for bringing about any Event, establishes the Use ....

**4. Wishart to the Revd George Benson, 29 Dec. 1748.** Unitarian College collection, John Rylands University Library, Manchester; published by permission of John Rylands University Library.

Edinburgh College December 29th 1748

Dear Sir

I take the opportunity of acknowledging Your very obliging Letter of October 21st, by this Young Gentleman Mr Bradfutt; whose Father is an honest old Minister in this Country,<sup>49</sup> & is very desirous that I should recommend him to any Dissenting Ministers in London, by whose conversation he may best improve in Theological studys; & I thought You, & such as You could introduce him to, the fittest for that purpose: my acquaintance with the Young Man himself is but short & small: but, as far as I can judge by that, he seems to be a Youth of good parts & Literature & of a good disposition of mind: I hope he shall not prove another F----y. But I am too long of acknowledging Your most kind present of the Paraphrase & Notes on St John’s Epistles; & truly I have not yet been able to find leisure to look into it. The only persons, almost, to whom I can, with any prospect of success, recommend such performances, are our ingenious and well-disposed Youth; & they are the properest hands to recommend them to their acquaintances, with whom they can converse with a freindly freedom: genuine Scripture knowlege is not much in request among our old folks of established

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<sup>49</sup> James Bradfute, 1680-1758, minister of Dunsyre, Lanarkshire, was important in William Leechman’s career, securing for him his early tutorships. Bradfute’s one son John, 1725-93, succeeded his father at Dunsyre. He was father of the co-founder of the bookselling and publishing business Bell and Bradfute, whose name survived until recently.

Popularity; they know of a shorter & easier way of coming at their purpose: but to any Young folks who come about my hand, & show an honest disposition to follow my advice (after putting them upon a thorough study of the Principles of Natural Religion & Morality, with other things preparatory to a critical search of the Scriptures) I fail not to recommend Your performances upon the New Testament; & have put them into some of their hands. The bearer may be a proper person to propagate them: for the Young folks converse more freely with one another (& I do not wonder at it) than with many of us old Divines.

I have yet got only two Copys of Dr Hunts 2, 1st volumes; but hope the 3d is a-coming.<sup>50</sup> I am heartily sorry, that the state of Your health is but indifferent: I pray God to restore & preserve it: I long much for the 3d part of Your History &c I should hope the materials for it might be easily gathered; though it may take some pains to put them together with the accuracy of the 2 former. I am glad the 1st Editions of that History, & of the Expositions on Paul's Epistles, are sold off: but, if the corrections in the 2d be any thing considerable; I hope they'll be printed by themselves, for the benefite of those who have the 1st.

I have never seen any answer to Dr D----ge's account of C: G----,<sup>51</sup> save a reproof for his attack on the Subscribing Clergy, written here by a Lay hand:<sup>52</sup> but I am a litle surprized at the great Doctor's intimacy with You; & even at Your mentioning the C (Sermons p. 426) as YOUR FREIND: I have heard much of his value for certain comments on the Gospels; but nothing of Yours upon the Epistles. Professor Leechman's Copy of JOHN was forwarded to him: & Mr Steel received long agoe his 7 Copys of Dr Hunts volumes, but I see him very seldom of late. I thank You for Your hint about Dr S----; which shall be, as You desire, *inter nos*: I shall be anxious to hear of him again; especially, when February is over: & am concerned that a man so well prepared as he should be uneasy or restless at the thoughts of his exit. I am much pleased with the 1st and 3d of Your Sermons; & indeed with

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<sup>50</sup> Jeremiah Hunt's *Sermons*, 4 vols., variously titled, were posthumously edited by Benson and published in 1748.

<sup>51</sup> Philip Doddridge, *The Christian Warrior Animated and Crowned: A sermon occasioned by the heroick death of the Hon. Col. James Gardiner* (London, 1745, frequently reprinted).

<sup>52</sup> In fact not a lay hand. Doddridge's correspondence identifies Wishart's authorship. See text.

most of them; though I still think there are in many of them Speculations (or ways of expressing them) out of the reach of the bulk of mankind: I find no fault with the 2d, but that most certain truths are not told in a plainer manner; nor do I remember ever to have met with ONE who put this question, "what the FITNESS OF THINGS is fit for?" Why should You have imagined the 12th & 13th would displease me? I like them much; if You'll take out a little hint, out of my reach, about SPACE.

My Wife returns You her compliments: & I beg You'll make mine to all our freinds at London-stone Coffeehouse. I am, Dear Sir, most sincerely

Your very affectionate Brother & humble servant  
WILL: WISHART